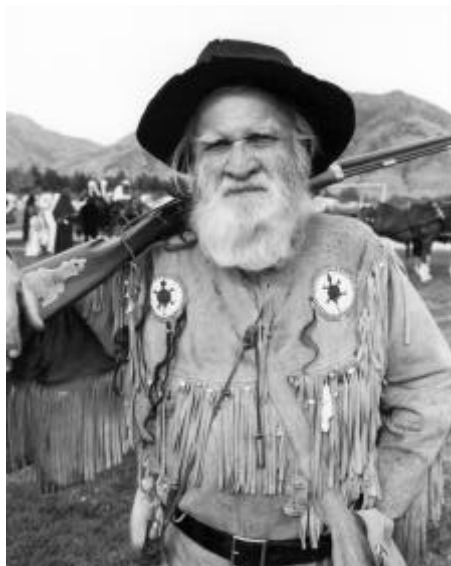


# Community Visioning Kit: Tourism Development in Utah



Festival of the American West

*Utah!*

**Division of Travel Development (Utah Travel Council)  
Department of Community and Economic Development  
April 1998**

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**State of Utah  
Division of Travel Development (Utah Travel Council)  
Department of Community and Economic Development  
Council Hall  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114  
April 1998**

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# Secrets of Successful Tourism Communities

*All quotes and topic headings were created based on the book, "Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities" by Jim Howe, Ed McMahon, and Luther Propst, Island Press, 1997.*

Tourism may currently be the single most important factor affecting rural Utah today. More and more, tourists are seeking unique experiences that involve unique heritage, culture, wildlife or natural beauty of a community and its surrounding landscape. If a destination is too much like everywhere else, too commercial or downtrodden, why should tourists spend time in your community? Likewise, communities are increasingly concerned with maintaining quality of life while allowing for economic development that will enhance jobs and earnings. The question is how to balance such seemingly contradictory needs and take control over the forces of change before change controls a community. Although your community may feel it is faced with an insurmountable task involving complex planning and financing issues, many examples exist of communities which have turned difficult situations into success stories. What follows are examples of actions tourism communities can take toward shaping tourism development to better meet community needs for quality of life and economic development.

## Develop a Widely Shared Vision

*"Every successful business, organization, or individual has a plan for the future. Communities are no different. If nothing else, a community needs to agree on a shared vision of what it wants to become."*

Even if a commonly shared vision exists of what a community should be, without a plan, a time line, specific strategies and steps, it is unlikely that the best-intentioned vision will materialize. This process takes three main steps: 1) identifying attractive and appealing features of your community (*What makes your community a good place to live?*) 2) articulating a preferred vision for your community's future (*What do you want your community to look like in 5, 10, or 20 years?*) 3) and perhaps the most important phase, identifying specific strategies and steps to realize your community's vision (*How will you implement this vision?*). These steps take place during a series of well-publicized public meetings that are designed to truly invite broad-based public input and ownership of the process.

## Create an Inventory of Local Assets

*"An accurate, concise profile of a community's natural and man-made resources, demographics, and economic trends is the starting point of any land-use or community-development initiative."*

Before planning for what your community should be, you need to inventory what your community already has. A citizen's committee can be charged with inventorying maps of land ownership, existing zoning, public lands and permitted activities on these lands. What would your community look like if developed at the level permitted by zoning laws? Document your local history, cultural assets, local demographic and land use trends. Where is your community heading considering current population growth?

## Build on Local Assets

*"Successful gateway communities craft economic and community-development policies around their distinctive assets: river corridors or waterfronts, stunning views of a mountain range or valley, a particular crop or manufactured product, a unique cultural heritage, a blue-ribbon trout stream, historic architecture, or unusual species of vegetation or wildlife."*

The local assets that enhance quality of life for residents are often the same assets that draw tourists to an area. Special assets, whether man-made, cultural or natural create a "sense of place" and offer tourists a unique experience that may make them inclined to stay longer in your community, spend more, and more likely to return or refer their friends. The question is how to draw upon natural and cultural assets while safeguarding them to local use for current and future residents. Carefully devised visitor management schemes, such as promoting certain areas over others, visitor fees, guided tours and restricted access to fragile areas are some options available to communities.

## Minimize the Need for Regulation

*"By themselves, regulations will not bring out the best in a community or protect what people value most"*

***about their town. Because they focus on prevention, regulations cannot offer a positive vision of how things should be.***

Regulations, although essential in establishing minimum codes of conduct, and preventing the worst in development, will not ensure that development meets the needs and desires of your community. Regulations that are not paralleled by a broad community vision may also be short-lived, repealed as a future commission or council is elected with a different set of ideas. Successful communities have found ways of combining market incentives with sound, widely accepted regulations such as innovative programs to acquire sensitive lands, tax abatements that promote rehabilitation of historic buildings, incentives to encourage developers to work in parallel with the community vision and citizen involvement in town beautification programs.

## **Meet the Needs of Both Landowner and Community**

***“Successful gateway communities also have the ability to recognize, and the courage to reject, development that doesn’t enhance local values. At the same time, they should realize that they can’t deal with the challenge of growth simply by rejecting all change.”***

Communities can establish criteria that evaluate future development against the vision and strategies outlined at the outset of the planning process. Communities can choose to work with developers who are willing to work with the community and incorporate ideas to better meet community needs. Conversely, communities need to be flexible and accommodate developers who are willing to adapt to community plans.

## **Team Up With Public Land Managers**

***“To be sure, local residents and managers of public lands often have honest differences over a community’s future direction. But their goals are increasingly similar. Both often agree on the need for open space, good jobs, clean air and water, productive land, and healthy, vital communities.”***

Public lands, whether national parks or recreation areas contribute to residents’ quality of life by providing recreation amenities, natural attractions and economic opportunities. Partnerships between communities and public land agencies are important links to enhancing the benefits to communities. Public land managers may have technical and financial

resources to assist communities willing to work with these agencies where common interests meet.

## **Recognize the Role of Non-Profit Organizations**

***“In gateway communities most successful at dealing with growth, one organization has transcended its traditional role or mission and focused instead on convincing local people to take on the entire range of issues important to the community.”***

These types of groups include economic development councils, chambers of commerce, neighborhood groups, local chapters of the League of Women Voters, senior citizen’s associations, or local environmental organizations. Some groups provide open forums for discussing ideas others actually implement the community’s ideas. Organizations that broaden its objectives to include a wider range of issues will also find more broad-based support.

## **Provide Opportunities for Leaders to Step Forward**

***“All too often, people conclude that they can’t change the course of events in their community. In our experience, however, everyday people - not just politicians or “experts” - can and do make a difference.”***

Local leaders can emerge where one least expects it - from longtime residents or newcomers - the challenge is in providing opportunities for new leaders to step forward. Open meetings, easy access and well-publicized meetings with meeting objectives will entice higher and more active participation. Leadership training and management workshops can also offer boosts to local leadership.

## **Pay Attention to Aesthetics**

***“The most successful communities strive for development that is not only fiscally and environmentally sound but visually pleasing as well.”***

Paying attention to aesthetics doesn’t just appeal to the eye, but appeals to good business as well. Communities that pay attention to the factors that make their towns and countryside appealing, tree-lined streets, attractive signs, historic facades, well-groomed neighborhoods, are finding a renewed sense of community pride as well as increased interest and business from tourists. A community vision can

greatly assist individual business owners in adapting new and old storefronts to local architectural traditions.

## Need for a Locally-Driven Process

Each successful community differs from the next but they all share a common concern for the future of their community. These communities actively involve a broad cross-section of residents in determining and planning for the future; they capitalize on their distinctive assets and utilize a variety of private-sector tools and market incentives to influence their design, instead of relying solely on regulations or government programs.

As communities around Utah seek solutions to issues of growth, increasing tourism and quality of life, the above actions may provide some ideas for proactive measures communities themselves can undertake. Although not all of these actions will be appropriate for all communities, one commonality is the need for local ownership. The main driving force for communities to take action must mainly come from within. Outside agents may be able to provide some direction, resources, or expertise but it is only the

communities themselves which have the vision and the vested interest to shape their community's direction.

## Community Case Studies

Numerous examples exist of how communities have survived and prospered in the face of declining population, faltering local economies and rampant growth. What follows are three case studies of communities which share common problems faced by many tourism communities in Utah: lack of sound financing, difficult access, seasonality, lack of community vision and lack of coordinated tourism theme. The Sun Valley case study illustrates the development of a destination resort faced by lack of sound financing, difficult access and high seasonality. DuBois, Wyo. provides a case study of how a community, faced with declining resource-based economy, crafted a vision and renewed itself as a destination for wildlife tourism. A gateway community to the Northern Cascades, Winthrop, Wash. faced severe decline as the timber mills closed in the late 1970s. Thanks to some good fortune, new opportunities and community vision, this gateway town re-invented itself into a successful western-theme destination for heritage tourism.

### **"Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities", Jim Howe, Ed McMahon, and Luther Propst, The Conservation Fund and Sonoran Institute**

***How to order: Contact Island Press 1-800-828-1302***

The authors of this volume offer practical and proven lessons on how residents of "gateway communities" - the small towns and open spaces that surround national and state parks, wildlife refuges, historic sites, and other public lands - can protect their community's identity while stimulating a healthy economy and safeguarding nearby natural and historic resources. They describe economic development strategies, land-use planning processes, and conservation tools that communities have found effective, thereby providing character and integrity of communities and landscapes without sacrificing local economic well-being.

Jim Howe is director of conservation programs at the Nature Conservancy, Central and Western New York Chapter in Rochester, New York. Ed Mc Mahon is director of the American Greenways Program at the Conservation Fund in Arlington, Virginia. Luther Propst is executive director of the Sonoran Institute in Tucson, Arizona.

165 pages - June 1997, Paperback: \$21.95, ISBN: 1-55963-545-2

## Buil ding on Local Assets to Re-create a Town: Dubois, Wyo.

*The following case study has been reprinted with permission from Luther Propst, the Sonoran Institute, from the book: "Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities", Jim Howe, Ed McMahon and Luther Propst, Island Press, 1997.*

Like people, communities often find they have unique strengths. When a local sawmill closed its doors in 1988, residents of frontier-town Dubois quickly organized a public workshop to determine how they could rebound from the loss of their largest employer. The group decided that rather than try to attract a new industry, Dubois needed to diversify its economy in a way that leveraged its most abundant assets - wildlife and wild lands. Today, the Dubois economy is a healthy mix of ranchers, hunting and fishing guides, wilderness outfitters, tourism-oriented businesses, and entrepreneurs who have relocated to the area because of its scenery and recreational lands.

The Wind River begins high in the mountains of western Wyoming then races down the narrow valley it has cut between the Absaroka Mountains and the Wind River Range. Nestled between two ranges, at 6,900 feet above sea level, sits Dubois, a town of about 900 people.

Dubois prides itself on its abundant wildlife. Just south is Whiskey Mountain, home to the largest concentration of bighorn sheep in the continental United States - more than a thousand animals. Elk, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, moose, mountain lions, and grizzly and black bears also inhabit the mountains and valleys around the town. A few years ago, in an effort to attract customers, a car-wash owner in Dubois attached a statue of a giant moose to the roof of his business. The wildlife theme caught on, and several larger-than-life statues of wildlife now grace the town: A bear guards the entrance to one motel, while an elk dominated the lawn of another; a 10-foot long rainbow trout curls around a fishing pole outside the local tackle shop. Even the restaurants cater to the outdoors enthusiast. Catch a few trout in the Wind River, and the Cowboy Cafe, a Main Street diner, will cook them up - cleaned in advance, please - and serve them to you with a baked potato and a vegetable for \$4.50. (Don't leave without trying a slice of their homemade pie.)

Dubois at one time was a logging town with more than a third of its residents employed at a



Louisiana - Pacific sawmill. When the mill shut down in 1988, many residents feared Dubois would become a ghost town.

Dubois proved them wrong. Today its economy is a diverse blend of Main Street shops, hunting and fishing guides, motels, ranchers, custom furniture manufacturers, wilderness outfitters, bed and breakfasts, retirees with pension and investment income, and log-home builders. Dubois also is attracting international consultants who report to work via the fax machine or computer modem, and who locate in Dubois because of the area's scenic setting and outdoor opportunities.

The mill's closing may have actually helped Dubois by forcing residents to prepare for the future. "After the mill left, we quickly realized that wild lands and wildlife are our two most powerful and valuable resources," says Pat Neary, a Dubois resident and director of the Fremont County Economic Development Council. "The Dubois economy depends on their protection." So much that a few years after the sawmill closed, the Dubois Chamber of Commerce shocked the U.S. Forest Service by opposing its decision to expand oil and gas leasing in the nearby Shoshone National Forest. Because of the chamber's protest, the agency scaled back leasing in the forest.

In 1993, Dubois received a significant economic boost with the opening of the National Bighorn Sheep Center, a cooperative project financed by Dubois residents, federal and state agencies, conservation organizations, and local economic development groups. "The Town of Dubois has focused its community development efforts on its most unique natural resource," reads a plaque in the center, "the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep of Whiskey Mountain."

The center, which highlights the ecology of the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, isn't just a tourist attraction. It also operates educational programs for school children and conducts scientific studies of the

local sheep population. In addition, the center's downtown location had sparked a new wave of investment in Dubois's Main Street.

Dubois is not without its problems, however. Like many other small Rocky Mountain communities, Dubois is experiencing an influx of newcomers in search of small-town values and scenery.

In 1992, Dubois sponsored a community visioning workshop to give residents a stronger voice in the town's future. Posters announcing the workshop featured the long arm of a rhinestone-studded cowboy reaching over Togwotee Pass, a 9,984-foot-high gap in the Absaroka Range, which separates the Wind River valley from its upscale neighbor, Jackson Hole. "The rallying cry from Dubois was, 'We don't want to be like Jackson,'" says Mary Ellen Honsaker, a local artist.

The workshop attracted more than 120 people. "There was a tremendous amount of involvement from all cross-sections of the community," Honsaker says. "We called every single person in the phone book to invite them to help determine the future of Dubois." Residents found they shared many of the same opinions about the town. Above all, they like Dubois because, in the words of Honsaker, "It's a real town. Cowboys

come here to shop for gear - there aren't any tourist traps."

After the workshop, Dubois residents formed citizens committees to work toward the goals they drew up. One of their first projects was a downtown beautification campaign. More than 100 people helped plant trees along Main Street. "We started with easy projects to show the benefits of staying together and having common goals to work toward," says Honsaker.

Other citizens committees have tackled issues such as architectural guidelines for homes and businesses, affordable housing, and land-use planning. One committee received an \$8,000 grant to map the most important wildlife habitat in the region.

The key to Dubois's success may lie in its refusal to follow the traditional economic development textbook for rural communities, which calls for laying out the welcome mat to any industry or development that chances by. Instead, Dubois is trying to find economic opportunities that allow it to build on its existing assets. "You can put up a front to attract people," says Mary Ellen Honsaker, "or you can tell your own story."



# Sun Valley: A Case Study in Destination Development



*"Many gateway communities have banned billboards to preserve scenic views like this one along a road in Sun Valley, Idaho. Others have restricted the size or number of signs, established billboard-free zones, or set up design committees to review new ones." Ed Mc Mahon<sup>1</sup>*

The example of Sun Valley, Idaho is particularly useful as an example of a year-round destination facility that has, through savvy marketing and investment strategies, turned a losing venture into a high-quality destination with adequate returns on capital investment over the long run.

## Origin of Sun Valley

In 1935, W. Averell Harriman, then U.P. chairman, took a personal interest in the creation of a destination resort that would nourish the public's hunger and fascination with alpine scenery, vibrant rivers and streams, and in particular, a European phenomenon called downhill skiing. With scouting assistance from Austrian nobleman, Count Felix Schaffgotsch, Harriman built his lodge in the Wood River Valley, near the town of Ketchum, Idaho. The only transportation link to this obscure and remote location was a spur on the U.P. line. To attract visitors, pioneering marketing efforts were developed, creating a balance between product development (an innovative uphill personal transportation system) and promotion (the first use of press agency). Although ski trains delivered diplomats, literati, and industrialists from the East and brought fun-loving celebrities from the new Hollywood colony, visitors had to place a high value on the destination experience, since getting to Sun Valley

was not easily accomplished. During traditional winter and summer seasons, the resort provided an extremely high standard of service. However, for the balance (and bulk) of the year, Sun Valley would close entirely.

In the early 1960's, with the advent of the auto-based family vacation, highway motels, and cheap gasoline, the Union Pacific Railroad decided to concentrate on freight transportation and sold Sun Valley (as well as the Utah Parks Company). Financially, the deep-pocketed railroad had been able to maintain the resort at a high standard, without pursuing contribution margin opportunities. The new buyer, a traditionalist and ski aficionado, sold land to outside condominium developers to subsidize short-season operations and to maintain premium resort standards. Once the land was gone and a crippling drought nearly eliminated operating revenues, the owner, Bill Janss, was forced to sell the Sun Valley Resort in 1977.

## Changing Travel Patterns Affect Destination Development

At this point, it is important to reflect on external developments that affect travel in general: changes in demographic patterns and available leisure time. As Americans became increasingly urban in the aftermath of the Second World War, so did their need to travel to scenic areas. The two-week car vacation to National Parks and Forests became part of the American Dream. As we approach the end of the century and with the advent of dual income families, travel continues to be an important leisure activity—but an increasingly greater premium is placed on time. Nowadays, people take more trips of a shorter duration. And when they select a desired destination, they want to maximize the time spent there and minimize the travel time necessary to reach it.

## New Owner for Sun Valley

The next chapter in the Sun Valley story, and this case study, should prove instructive for readers interested in destination development as a long-term element of Utah's tourism economy. The new buyer, a Utahan, brought more than merely the purchase price and operating capital to the table. He introduced several economic concepts which were thought to be quite

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<sup>1</sup>Howe, J., E. McMahon and L. Propst, 1997  
"Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities", Island Press

radical by Wood River Valley traditionalists. These include the following: (1) an expectation of a reasonable return on investment; (2) product development as a marketing tenant; (3) year-round utilization and the accompanying opportunities for a contribution margin; and (4) career-based employment opportunities for a large segment of the work force, not just for the resort's top management.

Examples of product developments in Sun Valley include computer-managed snow making systems that sense the atmospheric conditions to maximize snow production, high speed "quad" chair lifts that increase the time spent skiing and decrease the travel time up the mountain (duplicating the macro travel model at a micro level), foliage enhancements (hardly considered necessary in a beautiful forest, but extremely effective as an aesthetic presentation), comfortable, sensory-pleasing exterior and interior architecture, golf course improvements, and a higher level of performance in personal services.

Year-round utilization has produced conditions ideal for marginal profits. With the fixed costs covered through high season revenues, spring and fall visitors' revenues go directly to the bottom line. Today, using targeted group sales methods, the combined early summer, high summer, and fall seasons are likely to be more economically efficient than the winter ski season.

With year-round utilization comes another economic and operational efficiency: the reduction of

high labor turnover expenses and the maintenance of a highly trained, pride-filled set of service professionals who, as a result, can maintain a relatively high standard of living and quality lifestyle for themselves and their families. Although the resort still has some requirements for additional seasonal labor, it does not lose the important core group of service professionals twice each year or require them to supplement their employment elsewhere.

## **The Story Today**

Today, the story continues with massive capital injections into mountain base lodge development and constant asset replacement and refurbishment. Sun Valley has been able to build on an established reputation and reference to the glamour days of Hemingway and the Kennedys. It has also managed to re-create itself as a high quality, year-round destination. Yet, Sun Valley continues to be an inconvenient place to access; tourists must develop a strong desire to visit this destination. Once there, visitors are so rewarded for their trouble that they tend to develop an affinity for the place, and, in a significant majority of cases, return repeatedly, and year-round. This visitation pattern is accompanied by a consistent return on investment, suggesting a correlation between destination development and desirable economic outcomes.

## Winthrop, Wash.: Finding a Theme that Fits



Three events and a community visioning effort helped define the future of a small town in the northern cascades: a donation by the widow of the town's mill owner; the opening of a new highway and the purchase of key land by a company whose executives recognized the need for local support for any new development projects in the valley. The result is a getaway weekend haven for Seattle-ites and tourists seeking a unique western experience in the Northern Cascades. What they'll find is a nordic center and country inn at the base of what was to become a large ski resort and a charming western town with a distinct frontier identity, reminiscent of its heydays as a stop on the rush to gold.

### Donation Changes Two Towns

The town of Winthrop, rebuilt after a fire in 1893, lies in the magnificent Methow Valley in the rugged Northern Cascades. After the tragic death of her husband, Mrs. Kathryn Wagner, former owner of the valley's lumber mill, decided to give something back to the valley's towns, Twisp and Winthrop. Twisp got a public swimming pool and Winthrop regained some of its frontier flavor with a face-lift of sorts: an old-time Western town as seen in historic pictures.

### Turning Opportunities into Success

As the new North Cascades highway, linking the northern Cascades from east to west, was inaugurated in the 1970s, Winthrop became the first gateway town on the eastern side of the Cascades. The Wagner Foundation challenge grant provided an additional catalyst and helped galvanize the community's interest in reviving the local economy, traditionally dependent on now defunct timber activities. The restoration project gained widespread support from downtown business owners and the

community. The challenge grant was met through downtown business contributions and the city council passed a historic main street ordinance to ensure that future development would complement the local colors and architecture. Downtown restoration was completed in 1972 just as the highway received its finishing touch. Winthrop now boasts a handsome historic downtown area and a number of rodeos, festivals and auctions. "If it wasn't for our western theme, we'd be just another struggling western town," concludes Elinore Drake of the Winthrop Chamber.

Another project that did not enjoy unanimous community support was the planned large-scale downhill ski resort just up the valley. In 1993, the R.D. Merrill Company acquired the controversial property. Company executives recognized early on that any development plans would need local support. After discussions with local residents, a smaller-scale cross-country ski resort was proposed on the condition that Merrill impose a 1-percent surcharge on all property

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*"Many direct descendants of the original pioneers live in our valley. It is a young frontier. Self reliance, a dislike of urbanism and strong community ties still mark the modern day settlers who live here year round."*

*From "Coyote Tracks: History of Methow Valley"*

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transactions within the resort. The result was the creation of a market-derived source of revenue to purchase conservation easements, from willing sellers only, on other private lands in the valley. The R.D. Merrill Company also offered to help finance a new organization, the Methow Valley Conservancy, which will act as a steward to restore fish and wildlife habitat in the valley and offer environmental education programs to residents and visitors.

### The Story Today

Methow Valley now touts a world-class nordic center with over 200 K of groomed ski trails, an active trails association, an interesting old time Western town and the makings for protecting critical lands in the area.

However, no case study is ever perfect. R.D. Merrill's resort project has received some criticism from local environmental groups who claim that the project does

not go far enough in protecting air and water quality.

One important lesson that can be gleaned from this case study is that without community support and a vision for future development, opportunities such as a new highway can instead turn into liabilities that can

seriously affect the character and quality of life of a small rural town.

*For an interesting community website, see:*  
[www.methow.com/ctnmain.html](http://www.methow.com/ctnmain.html)

# Wel come to Anypl ace, U.S.A.

## Where You Can't Find the Tourist Attractions Amid the Shopping Mall s

*Reprinted with permission from Ed. Mc Mahon, a land use planner and attorney who works for the Conservation Fund in Arlington, VA. The article originally appeared in the "Outlook" section of the Washington Post, August 31, 1997.*

So what did you do on your summer vacation? Did the destination meet your expectations? Would you recommend it to a friend? Or did dirty air, traffic congestion, crowded beaches, slipshod service or towns awash in tourist schlock leave you feeling frustrated and cheated?

Tourism is the world's largest industry. Today, Americans spend almost \$400 billion a year on travel and recreation away from home. Travel and tourism account for one out of every nine jobs in the United States. Tourism is the leading industry in 37 states. But it is a two-edged sword: in many parts of the country, tourism is harming the very assets that attracted visitors in the first place.

We are all familiar with the colorful ads that American cities and towns use to promote their charms. They are always filled with attractive scenes: sunsets, azaleas in bloom, historic house-museums beautifully photographed. But the reality is often not as lovely. Back away from the columned house and you'll find, as likely as not, that it is hemmed in by a fast food restaurant with a screaming red roof on one side and a parking lot with a flashing portable sign on the other. The advertisement is handsome; the city is not.

I'll never forget our family vacation to "Pennsylvania Dutch Country." Expecting to see bucolic countryside where every farm is prosperous and every town is quaint (thanks to the Amish and Mennonites who settled there in the 18<sup>th</sup> century), we were disappointed to find a sprawling suburb dominated by roads much like Rockville Pike. My most vivid memory is of our daughter saying, "Daddy,

Studies reveal significant differences in the way tourists and residents perceive a community. Tourists notice everything around them, while residents tend to tune out the familiar environment along the roads they travel daily. If the character of a destination is at odds with its description in promotional literature, the tourist will feel cheated. Creating a false image can spoil a vacation and discourage return visits. The marketing of Lancaster County in Pennsylvania is first-rate, but the landscape that appears in its promotional literature is fast disappearing. Like me, many tourists go once but don't go back.

I didn't know the Amish lived in castles," as we sat stuck in traffic near the Dutch Wonderland theme park.

There is an important but often ignored relationship between tourism and the environment. Unfortunately, many tourism officials are far more concerned with marketing and promotions - creating fancy brochures and compelling ads - than they are with protecting and enhancing the product they are trying to sell.

Tourism involves more than marketing. It also involves making destinations more appealing. This means conserving and enhancing a destination's natural assets. It is, after all, the unique heritage, culture, wildlife, or natural beauty of a community or region that attracts sightseers in the first place.

Clearly, certain places have more appeal than others. But no place will retain its special appeal without effort. If the destination is too crowded, too commercial or too much like every place else, then why go? The more a community does to conserve its unique resources, whether natural or man-made, the more tourists it will attract. On the other hand, the more a community comes to resemble "Anyplace, U.S.A.," the less reason there will be to visit.

This is why local planning, zoning and urban design standards are so important to communities with tourism resources. When shopping centers and housing developments come in, do they complement the resource or compromise it? Communities know they are in trouble when new development shapes the character of the community, instead of the community shaping new development.

Tourism is a voluntary activity, and tourists are faced with competing destinations. Given a choice, where will they go? Virtually every study of traveler motivations has shown that, along with rest and recreation, visiting scenic areas and historic sites are two of the top reasons why people travel. Travel writer Arthur Frommer says that, "Among cities with no particular recreational appeal, those that have preserved their past continue to enjoy tourism. Those that haven't receive almost no tourism at all. Tourism simply doesn't go to a city that has lost its soul."

So how can a community attract tourists and their dollars without losing its soul? First, the community's leaders must recognize that the place itself - not the trappings around it - is the reason that most tourists come for a visit. Second, they must understand that sustaining tourism requires a long-term strategy. As economic development expert Don Rypkema says, "Nobody goes anywhere to go down a waterslide or buy a T-shirt. They may do both these things, but that isn't the reason they went there." Any place can create a tourist attraction, but it is those places that are attraction in and of themselves that people most want to visit.

Preservation-minded cities like Annapolis; Savannah, Ga.; Charleston, S.C.; Santa Fe, N.M.; Victoria, B.C.; Quebec City; and Guanajuato, Mexico, are among North America's leading tourism destinations precisely because they have protected their unique architectural heritage. By contrast, cities that have obliterated their past attract hardly any visitors at all, except for the highly competitive and notoriously fickle convention business.

Not every community is blessed with a great natural wonder or a rich legacy of historic buildings, but most communities have the potential to attract tourists. To realize this potential, a community must take stock of its assets. What natural, cultural, or historic resources does it have to offer? What features give the community its special character and identity?

This is how Lowell, Mass., began its transformation from a city known as a gritty, declining factory town - with an unemployment rate of 23 percent - to a booming tourist destination that receives over 900,000 visitors a year. The city has restored 250 historic buildings, and seen over \$1 billion in investments. It all began by recognizing the potential that existed in those abandoned mill buildings.

To preserve and enhance the resources that make a community interesting, memorable and unique, communities and the tourism industry should consider the following:

- **Focus on the authentic.**

Make every effort to preserve the authentic aspects of local heritage and culture, including handicrafts, art, music, language, architecture, landscape, traditions and history. The true story or an area is worth telling even if it's painful or disturbing. In Birmingham, for example, the Civil Rights Museum and Historic District describes the city's turbulent history during the 1950s and 1960s. This has enhanced Birmingham's appeal as a destination. By contrast, many tourist attractions near the Smoky Mountains

National Park portray Cherokee Indians as using teepees, totem poles and feather war bonnets, even though this was never part of their culture. This commercialization and stereotyping has caused anger towards the tourism industry and devalued the area as a destination.

- **Recognize that tourism has limits.**

Too many cars, boats, tour buses, condominiums or people can overwhelm a community and harm fragile resources. Tourism development that exceeds the capacity of the ecosystem or fails to respect a community's sense of place will result in resentment and the eventual destruction of the very attributes that tourists come to enjoy.

A few communities have found ways to balance nature and commerce. One of them is Sanibel Island, Fla., a popular Gulf Coast resort that is one of the world's premier places to collect seashells and see sub-tropical birds. To protect its abundant wildlife, white sand beaches and quiet charm, Sanibel developed a master plan based on an analysis of what was needed to protect the island's natural systems. The plan set a limit on the island population consistent with its drinking water supply, the habitat needs of wildlife, the need to evacuate the island before hurricanes and other considerations. By establishing development standards based on ecological constraints, Sanibel has managed to preserve one of America's most exceptional sub-tropical environments while also accommodating a high number of visitors.

- **Insure that hotels, motels, restaurants and shops fit in with their surroundings.**

Tourists crave integrity of place wherever they go, and homogenous, "off-the-shelf" corporate chains and franchise architecture work against this. I remember how charmed I was on my first visit to Lexington, Va. - a Norman Rockwell sort of town in the Shenandoah Valley north of Roanoke. Nor will I forget how offended I was on a later visit when I found a row of gaudy, cookie-cutter fast food joints, cheek by jowl with the town's historic architecture. By contrast, the fast food restaurants in Freeport, Maine, (home to L.L. Bean) are located in restored 19<sup>th</sup> Century buildings.

A community's food and lodging establishments are part of the total tourism package. Shouldn't hotels in Maine be different in style from those in Maryland, Montana, Malaysia or Morocco? It is this search for something different that has given rise to the booming bed and breakfast, adventure travel and heritage tourism industries.

- **Interpret the resource.**

Visitors want information about what they are seeing. Interpretation can be a powerful story-telling tool that can make an attraction, even an entire community, come alive. It can also result in better managed resources by explaining why the resources are important. Interpretation instills respect and fosters stewardship in both visitors and residents. Education about natural and cultural resources can instill community pride and strengthen sense of place. The National Elk Refuge, outside of Jackson, Wyo., is one of several “watchable wildlife” sites that include interpretative displays that help visitors to understand that without “habitat” there would be no elk, bears or other wildlife to watch.

- **Remember aesthetics and ecology.**

Clean air and clean water are fundamental to sustainable tourism. But as Mark Twain once said, “We take stock of a city like we take stock of a man. The clothes or appearance are the external by which we judge.” Many cities have gotten used to ugliness, accepting it as an inevitable part of progress. But more enlightened communities recognize that the way a community looks affects its image and its economic

well-being. Protecting scenic views and vistas, planting trees, landscaping parking lots and controlling signs are all fundamentally important to the economic health of a community.

- **Enhance the journey as well as the destination.**

Getting there should be half the fun, but frequently it is not. There are many great destinations in America, but unfortunately, there are fewer great journeys left, which is why it is in the interest of the tourism industry to encourage the development of greenways, heritage corridors, bike paths and hiking trails. This is also why local and state governments should designate more scenic byways and protect more roads with scenic or historic character.

In recent years American tourism has had less and less to do with America and more to do with tourism. As the amount of open land decreases, tourism marketing dollars increase. As historic buildings disappear, theme parks proliferate. Unless the tourist industry thinks it can continue to sell trips to communities clogged with look-alike motels, polluted streams, traffic jams and cluttered commercial strips, it ought to join in an effort to protect the natural, cultural and scenic resources on which it relies.